

REPORT - RIBA Student Destinations Survey 2016

Introduction

The RIBA Student Destinations Survey is a partnership project between the RIBA and the University of Sheffield. It is a study to be delivered over a ten-year period. It is currently in its sixth year.

The project has been designed to provide a picture of the employment situation for RIBA Part 1 graduates. At present very little is known about where RIBA Part 1 graduates eventually end up working, such as:

- What proportion of graduates stay in the profession?
- The effect of student fees on who enters architectural education?
- If graduates leave the profession, why do they leave and how useful was their education in securing work in another field?
- How prepared are graduates to move to other parts of the world to find employment?

We need this information in order to inform architectural education in the future, improving the employability of RIBA Part 1 graduates and to gain a better understanding of what happens when graduates leave school to join the profession. Therefore, this information is crucial to the future development of the profession.

Methodology

For the pilot phase in 2011, seven schools of architecture with different profiles from across the UK were invited to participate. The University of Sheffield, in collaboration with RIBA and the participating schools, created a pilot questionnaire to send out to recent Part 1 graduates. This survey was emailed as an online version via 'survey monkey' directly to graduates from their own university. In 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2016 the same questionnaire was utilised with the identical schools sending out the questionnaire to recent Part 1 graduates and also those who had been sent the survey in the previous year(s) (many email addresses had changed on their databases which resulted in expected attrition). The process received ethical approval through the University of Sheffield ethical review process.

The seven participating schools of universities are:

- Birmingham City University
- Cardiff University
- Kingston University
- Northumbria University
- Queen's University
- Robert Gordon University
- University of Sheffield

The collection process enables an analysis of the responses of those who completed the survey in 2011 (who were RIBA Part 1 graduates from 2010), 2012 (who were RIBA Part 1 graduates in 2010 or 2011), 2013 (who were RIBA Part 1 graduates in 2010, 2011 or 2012), 2014 (who were RIBA Part 1 graduates in 2010, 2011, 2012 or 2013), 2015 (who were RIBA

Part 1 graduates in 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013 or 2014) and 2016 (who were RIBA Part 1 graduates in 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014 or 2015).

In 2011 the survey was open for one month and **138** graduates who had recently completed RIBA Part 1 responded. The following year, 2012, also saw the survey open for a month and **55** graduates who had recently completed RIBA Part 1 responded and **37** graduates who completed their RIBA Part 1 in 2010. In 2013, once again over a period of a month, **46** graduates who had recently completed RIBA Part 1 (in 2012) responded, **32** graduates who completed their RIBA Part 1 in 2011 and **23** graduates who completed their RIBA Part 1 in 2010. In 2014 **72** graduates who had recently completed RIBA Part 1 (in 2013) responded, **44** graduates who completed their RIBA Part 1 in 2012, **36** graduates who completed their RIBA Part 1 in 2011 and **41** graduates who completed their RIBA Part 1 in 2010. In 2015, once again over a period of a month, **57** graduates who had recently completed RIBA Part 1 (in 2014) responded, **59** graduates who completed their RIBA Part 1 in 2013, **35** graduates who completed their RIBA Part 1 in 2012, **43** graduates who completed their RIBA Part 1 in 2011 and **37** graduates who completed their RIBA Part 1 in 2010. In 2016, over the same period of a month, **42** graduates who had recently completed RIBA Part 1 (in 2015) responded, **37** graduates who completed their RIBA Part 1 in 2014, **38** graduates who completed their RIBA Part 1 in 2013, **24** graduates who completed their RIBA Part 1 in 2012, **26** graduates who completed their RIBA Part 1 in 2011 and **41** graduates who completed their RIBA Part 1 in 2010.

These represent relatively small numbers; especially for the 2012 survey, a factor that must be taken into account in the reporting of results. Unfortunately the number of respondents in 2016 represented a slight reduction in numbers compared to 2015 which was the highest yet.

Findings

1. Attitudes to architectural studies

On a very positive note when focussing on those who had very recently completed their RIBA Part 1 (in the previous year), only 3% of 2010 graduates in the 2011 survey, 4% of 2011 graduates in the 2012 survey, 2% of 2012 graduates in the 2013 survey, 8% of 2013 graduates in the 2014 survey and 0% of 2014 graduates in the 2015 survey and 6% of the 2015 graduates in the 2016 survey that filled in the survey disagreed when asked whether they were glad they chose to study architecture at University. Of those 2010 graduates in the 2012 survey only 5% disagreed when asked whether they were glad they chose to study architecture at university. The 2010 Graduates in the 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2016 surveys were slightly more inclined (13%, 11%, 11% and 6% respectively) to disagree with the statement, although this was based on a small sample and the respondents may have been the same individuals. This may indicate that the further graduates get from the completion of the course the less satisfied with their choice of course they were. It will be interesting to see how these trends develop in future years. Generally the respondents felt that they had developed a wide range of transferable skills in the course of their training, though many would have liked to have learnt more about certain skills to enhance their employability. In the four years of the survey the graduates highlighted areas which required more emphasis in architectural training. When all respondents in the 2016 survey were included the top five responses were:

- IT (33%)
- Management (34%)

- Consultation skills (45%)
- Construction knowledge (55%)
- Project management (55%)

These five areas were also the most commonly identified areas in the previous four surveys emphasising the need for universities to ensure students are provided with the opportunity to develop these skills.

2. Employment situations

80% of all graduates completing the survey in 2016 were in some form of paid employment (this figure includes part-time employment and those who are self-employed/freelance) and 18% were undertaking further studies or training. This compares with 79% of all graduates completing the survey in 2015 who were in some form of paid employment (this figure includes part-time employment and those who are self-employed/freelance) and 16% who were undertaking further studies or training. 78% of all graduates completing the survey in 2014 were in some form of paid employment (this figure includes part-time employment and those who are self-employed/freelance) and 20% were undertaking further studies or training. 62% of all graduates completing the survey in 2013 were in some form of paid employment (this figure includes part-time employment and those who are self-employed/freelance) and 20% were undertaking further studies or training. This compares with 73% of graduates in some form of paid employment and 22% undertaking further university studies in 2011 and 71% of the graduates in some form of paid employment and 17% undertaking further university studies in 2012. Among 2010 graduates completing the survey in 2016 unemployment levels were at 2% and among 2011 graduates completing the survey in 2016 it was at 8%, 0% for 2012 graduates, 11% for 2013 graduates, 11% for 2014 graduates and 10% for 2015 graduates, indicating little difference in levels of unemployment between the different years of completion among those undertaking the most recent survey. While not all of the respondents who were unemployed were looking for further employment it is important to monitor levels of employment in future surveys. Of the all Graduates in employment in 2016 small numbers of work hours were uncommon with all of the respondents working 35 hours or more a week and approximately a third working 42 hrs a week or more. These trends are similar to the previous four years.

i) Employed in architecture

In the 2016 survey of those 2015 Graduates in employment 83% were working within architecture. In the 2015 survey of those 2014 Graduates in employment 84% were working within architecture. This compares with 79% of those 2013 Graduates in employment working within architecture in the 2014 survey. This is similar to the 78% of 2012 Graduates in the 2013 survey, 75% of 2011 Graduates in the 2012 survey and 78% of 2010 Graduates in the 2011 survey. This indicates a fairly static picture. 9% of all graduates responding to the survey in 2016 had more than one form of employment (it was approximately a 6th in the previous four). Over half of all of the survey respondents in the 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014 and 2015 surveys and a quarter of 2016 respondents stated that the additional employment was in order to, 'earn a living / pay back loans'. This was typically the most common response when asked why they undertook additional forms of employment. Given that the second job was, invariably, not from within the sphere of architecture it is perhaps not surprising that little emphasis was placed on the experience it provided or it fitting in with career plans. When focussing on all 2016 survey respondents under 4% envisaged not working in

architecture for all or most of their career although there were a number who were unsure of their future career plans. There was however some concern about the difficulty in remaining in architecture and employment opportunities. For instance, only 9% of all graduates in the 2016 survey strongly agreed that there are lots of paid employment opportunities available in architecture. One respondent in the 2015 survey claimed that 'It's generally hard (to get a job in architecture) without having contacts from what I understand. As I do not have any contact other than the one I had I find it hard to find another job in my field'. A 2016 respondent stated 'I have become disenchanted by many aspects of the life of an architect and the undiscussed requirements, such as the huge amounts of unpaid overtime which is almost everywhere, not seeing your family, not being able to afford to buy in London where work is etc'.

At the same time there was also almost a sense that it would be wasteful not to pursue a career in architecture given the time invested in it and skills developed. A 2016 respondent stated 'I love designing and architecture. Have studied for 8 years so I could be an architect'. 'I study architecture because I love it, I work in architecture because I love it, I'll have invested half a decade in studying architecture so I better be damn good at it!' claimed a 2011 Graduate in the 2012 survey. A 2015 graduate said 'I wouldn't want to do anything else - this is the profession I wanted to be in since I was a child, and I wouldn't have it any other way'. A 2016 respondent felt 'architecture provides a mentally stimulating working environment, with global opportunities and endless innovation'. Other participants also mentioned the length of time taken to complete the training as a real commitment.

ii) Employed outside of architecture

In the 2016 survey the great majority of the respondents that were 'not working in architecture or studying but were in other forms of employment' wanted to be involved in architecture with only 4% stating that they were no longer interested in architecture as a career. There was some evidence of people struggling to find employment. These figures echoed those responses in the previous five surveys. A number of participants identified their role as being in design, planning or construction rather than specifically architecture. When participants did not want a career in architecture stress was mentioned more than once. For instance, a 2016 respondent stated 'remuneration versus expectation of work and long hours may put me off in favour of a more sociable career path'. Another 2016 survey respondent stated that 'architecture is fun in practice, but horrendously stressful at university'. In fact one respondent in 2016 stated that 'the degree made me depressed and suffer from bad anxiety. I didn't see the point in living life like that - Architecture wasn't for me'.

3. Alternative paths

The survey shows that when considering all respondents in the 2015 survey, 16% were working outside of the UK. This represents a similar figure to the previous five years surveys. They were generally quite conservative in their career path, sticking to the standard architectural route. Over the course of the five surveys very few of those undertaking further study were doing this outside of architecture and only a small number had entered into other creative professions. As the students have only recently graduated this is perhaps not surprising.

4. Support and finances

The survey showed that parental support is important in architectural education. Among 2016 survey 36% of those undertaking further study were mainly funded through family support in the form of a trust fund, inheritance or allowance. It is more similar to the previous two surveys. Just over half of all the graduates in the 2016 survey had had to work during their degree to manage financially (which is very similar to the previous year). However, approximately 75% of respondents said that the issue of student debt had not influenced their career path. This may become more of an issue in the future. However, only 29% of 2016 respondents who did the course in 2010 said they would still have done it with fees. Respondents in 2016 had different attitudes towards student debt. For instance, one respondent stated 'I am currently ignoring the huge debt I have, and have chosen to pursue a job I enjoy, even though it is not particularly well paid. However, this is not sustainable for the long term'. Another respondent stated that 'it is a financial burden which I will always be wary of until I can pay it off. Psychologically it is stressful'. While a further 2016 respondent pointed towards the scale of the debt as substantial: 'I will total around 70k debt after my MA in architecture, this equates to a salary of 54k per year from day 1 to pay back 70k + interest over 30 years exactly. Kind of insane'. It had also influenced decisions regarding employment and further training. One respondent discussed 'deferring further study to raise funds as well as part time study to lower costs' and another stated that they were 'unable to gain experience in architectural practice while studying and immediately after as debt meant I needed to work outside architecture in order to pay off debt'.

Family background seems to have been an important influence on whether students enter into architectural education. In the 2016 survey where responses were provided 74% of graduate's father's and 63% of their mother's last employment was in 'Intermediate managerial, administrative, professional e.g. bank manager, teacher' or 'Higher managerial, administrative, professional e.g. chief executive, senior civil servant, surgeon'. Therefore it is evident that the majority of architecture students come from relatively affluent backgrounds.

5. Diversity

With regard to gender the survey is already showing up some interesting findings. The experience of the men and women was reasonably similar in many respects (men represented just 50% of the 2016 graduates surveyed). In the 2016 survey it was evident that men were more likely to be employed on a permanent, open ended contract on a full-time basis or be self-employed/freelance than women. When all income from employment was combined men were more likely than women to be in the highest earning categories in 2016. Furthermore, when the six years of surveys are combined women who did not work in architecture were more likely to state that they were prevented from working in architecture as a result of a 'lack of confidence' compared to men regardless of when they graduated. In the 2016 survey this figure was 35% for women compared to 11% for men. Therefore, gender may already be impacting on female respondents even at this early stage in their career.

Conclusion

These findings will not come as a surprise to anyone working in the sphere of architecture. The importance of this survey lies in creating a statistical foundation for the years that follow. What will be really interesting will be to see how the perceptions and experiences of these architecture graduates change over the coming decade, one that may radically change the profile of the profession.

Dr Liam Foster